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Trio brings warmth to Brahms

By JACOB SISKIND of The Gazette

The thought of a new piano trio making the concert circuit rounds always stimulates the musical adrenalin.

There are so few groups that perform the music for this combination of instruments, and there is so enormous a repertoire for it, that the prospect of a new group joining the ranks is immediately appealing.

The Israel Piano Trio is new to Montreal. It made its debut before members of the Ladies' Morning Musical Club yesterday afternoon. The members of the trio are Israeli by adoption, not by birth.

The pianist, Alexander Volkov, was trained at the Kharkov Music Academy in the Ukraine and arrived in Israel in 1971. The violinist, Menahem Breuer, was born in Austria, while the cellist, Zvi Harell, was born in Berlin.

Despite the variety of cultural backgrounds the three make music together quite agreeably and in a program of music by Brahms, Copland and Ravel made it clear once again how completely international a language is music.

But of course each ensemble brings its own view to any music it plays and that is what makes concerts by different groups so interesting.

Earlier this week Montrealers had the opportunity to hear the Beaux Arts Trio perform an early Trio by Brahms, the Op. 8. The Israel Trio chose to play the Brahms trio Op. 87 on their program.

Two more different views of Brahms, of the character of the composer and the color of his music, could not be imagined.

While the Beaux Arts opted for transparency, the Israel Trio chose a warmer, more opaque sound. Their interpretation made the most of the lyrical passages in the score, making the music sound much more warm and emotional than one often hears these days.

There is certainly not uninvolved playing, though there were times when I felt that a little more distance might have been to their and the listeners' advantage.

I had the feeling that they were so totally committed to the music, to the shaping of every phrase, that they often lost sight of the forest for the trees.

The playing was of a high calibre, individually, and as an ensemble there were no moments when the three men were not playing absolutely together — but so much emotion was being generated by each of the players that it got in the way of the music as a whole, for me at least.

DIFFERENT

The Ravel Trio, one of my favorite chamber works, was given a most interesting performance, one quite different from any I have heard before.

I usually see the music of Ravel, and particularly his trio, as colored in pinks and powder blues.

The performance yesterday had all the outlines carefully limned but the colors seemed to me to be in shades of brown, dark red and dark green.

The reading had an emotional quality one does not usually associate with Ravel — at least I don't — and it was interesting to hear the music played in this way.

The music had a sense of ebb and flow, a kind of push-pull that pushed the phrase endings out of their usual alignment. One often hears long pauses for breath in the music of Schumann or Brahms, but one does not often hear the music of Ravel treated in this way.

SUCCESS

That it works was evident from the success the players had with their performance.

As an encore the ensemble returned to play the Scherzo movement from the Mendelssohn Trio No. 1 — giving it a reading that again was filled with greater emotional intensity than one usually hears in this score.

In all an interesting afternoon of performances off the beaten track and readings that were surprisingly convincing under the circumstances.

Snow White and friends

The Gingerbread Players and Jack — a children's theatre company working out of New York — have been coming to Montreal for a couple of years now. Next Saturday, Nov. 15, they're bringing in their version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (above) for one showing only, at 1:30 p.m., in the Salle Wilfred-Pelletier of the Place des Arts. The script is by Elsa Rael and the score is by Michael Valenti. As a special added attraction, Screpo the Clown will entertain the children with magic and balloons.

Frustration, loneliness

Concert honors innovator Varèse

By JACOB SISKIND of The Gazette

It was exactly 10 years ago last night that Edgard Varèse died in New York. To mark the date, the Société de Musique Contemporaine du Québec prepared and presented a concert devoted entirely to his music.

Actually I doubt that such a concert would have been possible in any other city in the world today.

Varèse was an innovator — both in the materials he used for his composition and the forms and devices he employed. How far ahead of his time he was became evident as the evening at the Pollack Concert Hall progressed.

The program was made up of Octandre, composed in 1923; Integrales, completed in 1925; Ecuatorial, composed in 1934; Ionisation, composed in 1931; and Déserts, completed in 1954.

With the exception of the last work, all of these pieces used conventional instruments in an unconventional manner. Déserts used a magnetic tape as well as conventional instruments.

Each work is a world unto itself and does things with sound that no composer before Varèse had ever attempted. Since these pieces were first performed, they have had an enormous influence on certain circles in contemporary music.

While each work breaks new ground in a different way, it was Déserts that proved to be the most innovative and the most durable of all the music presented.

Despite the contribution by a tape that sounded as though it had been dipped in peanut butter before being played, the work captures the loneliness and frustration of the man who stood alone for his musical ideals for almost all of his career as a composer.

It was only in the last decade of his life that Varèse enjoyed any measure of public recognition and this one feels almost oppressively in Déserts, which is surely one of the blackest pieces of music composed in the past quarter of a century.

Serge Garant and his musicians seemed determined to give all of the music its just deserts and by and large the performances were successful.

I did not hear the first two pieces in the program. Over at Redpath Hall, the McGill Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Alexander Brott was giving a Mostly Mozart concert with Liliane Garnier-Lesage as soloist in the Violin Concerto No. 3, in G.

Mae Garnier, who comes from France, settled in Quebec City about 15 years ago after a distinguished career as a soloist in Europe. On the strength of her performance last night one suspects that she has spent the last decade and a half teaching and not playing in public.

Fans love rock's 'dirty young man'

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ for The Gazette

Plume Latraverse is the "dirty young man" of Quebecois rock.

He sings in a crude local growl, twisting and contorting his joual phraseology with a kind of drunken dexterity usually reserved for tavern waiters. If Real Caouette could sing rock 'n' roll, he would doubtless sound like Plume.

His rise to stardom inside the province has been rapid: his first two albums, Plume Pouding and Show Son Sale, have been fixtures on the Quebec sales charts this year. Now, after a three-week vacation in Martinique, Plume is back with new songs from a forthcoming duo, Pommes de Routes, in his latest show at Cinema Outremont (where he performs twice tonight).

FANS YOUNG

Last night's concert, which kickstarts a 39-stop province-wide tour ending next January, attracted a near capacity audience in this favorite local rock palace. His fans were young, from about 16 to 22 years, and obviously in the mood to enjoy Plume's hit-or-miss offerings.

Plume's corny parochial humor was crass but nevertheless all done in good fun. The music he and his trio play is "bon looss," a ragged compost of tootsapping country-rock and skull-bending heavy metal clichés, filtered through a boozy local state of consciousness.

The singer, who strums his guitar in a metronomic manner, is supported by an energetic band, comprised of Yvesgourd Knorh (no, that's not a typographical error), Maurice Richard (no relation of The Rocket), and Casson-ade (Plume's main song collaborator).

DEBUT

Next week the Outremont presents debut local concerts by three new groups: Hortlipi, an Irish quintet that combines traditional Celtic folklore with loud burning rock (Thursday); Renaissance, a British quartet specializing in a renaissance music synthesis with rock (Friday); and Pollen, a quartet from Quebec City with a jazz-rock improvisational style (Saturday).

Show co-star

Michel Pagliaro, above, co-stars at the Super Disco-Dance show tomorrow night at Place Bonaventure's Exhibition Hall. Also starring is singer Ginette Reno, who has spent much of the last two years in California preparing an international act. Pagliaro, who has a string of hit records, will sing numbers from his next album, due for U.S. release.

Gainsborough feared burned

INVERARAY, Scotland — (AP) — The Duke of Argyll said today a Gainsborough painting which he valued at $1,260,000 may have been destroyed Wednesday night when fire swept through his ancestral home, Inveraray Castle.

Theatre Lab punishes audience

By JACK KAPICA of The Gazette

It would be merely natural to approach a theatrical version of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's mammoth novel Crime and Punishment with a certain hesitancy.

How anyone could ever translate that piece of pre-Freudian psychology into a stage play which captures the essence of the great Russian's tremendous sweep of thought is decidedly a challenge.

And so it would be logical to attempt it by using an abstract form of interpretation — Which relies on symbols rather than mere words — as Alexander Hausvater has done with his Theatre Lab adaptation, now playing at the Centaur Theatre until Nov. 22.

Regrettably Hausvater — who produced and directed the production as well — has staged his version with such intellectual bankruptcy that the final result could not even awaken Dostoyevsky in his grave, much less send him turning cartwheels.

It is painfully obvious that Hausvater is incapable of dealing with words. He blends two styles into one — the traditional approach of actors speaking lines, and the style of abstract symbolism in which actors operate with the passion of robots.

Whereas Hausvater handles the abstractionism with total incompetence, his manner with the natural style is completely nonexistent. When actors are supposed to act, they seem to have been left to their own devices, which prove woefully inadequate.

And, left to their own devices, they carry on with the silly robotic movements carried over from the earlier scenes. As a result, it is impossible to be sympathetic to either style.

This unrelieved boredom is never broken except at two points, both of which are so ridiculous in context as to be laughable. One is a favorite trick of Hausvater's — the obligatory nude scene, in which a girl's exposed breasts are fondled by severed hands sticking from a backdrop. The other is a stomp-and-grind session which has nothing to do with the play.

It's a pathetic display, unworthy of a church basement theatre company and completely unworthy of any audience.

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